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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of an on-site investigation of the provision of library services to distance education students in Canada, which was conducted to obtain information for use in developing a similar program for the off-campus higher education program offered by the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHED) in Ireland. Descriptions of the provision of library services to off-campus students at eight Canadian institutions are based on visits to those institutions, i.e., the University of Ottawa, Lakehead University, Brandon University, Athabasca University, the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, the Open Learning Institute, and the University of British Columbia. Information from the University of New Brunswick, Trent University, and the University of Manitoba is also included in the study. The common components of these off-campus library services are detailed, and cost factors are discussed. Several proposals for the provision of off-campus library services for the NIHED are made, and a proposal to allow access to the collections of the NIHED library by off-campus students via mail or telephone is recommended, based primarily on constraints imposed by economic factors and the size of the NIHED library. Finally, the costs of providing services based on the recommended proposal are projected. A 15-item bibliography and a 34-item list of additional references are provided. (EW)

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LIBRARY SERVICES FOR OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS: A STUDY OF CANADIAN PRACTICE AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR IRELAND

Brian A. Nettlefold

Director of Library Services

National Institute for Higher Education, Dublin, Ireland

1988

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Introduction

The need to provide full library service to ALL registered students of the National Institute for Higher Education, Dublin (NIHED), became apparent when the National Distance Education Centre proposed to the Institute's Academic Council to offer a Bachelor's degree programme in Information Technology, to be run solely through the medium of distance learning. The National Distance Education Centre is an Irish government-funded autonomous body located on the campus of NIHED, from where it derives most of its services. Since no similarly extensive provision of library service existed in Ireland, a (successful) inter-regional request was submitted under the UNESCO Participation Programme for the 1986-87 biennium for a funded fellowship to allow the author to investigate how such services have been provided by universities in Canada.

Canada was chosen for this investigation as a result of the author's attendance at the 1985 annual conference of the Canadian Library Association in Calgary, Alberta. During that conference, a session was held on the subject of off-campus library services, at which the results of a survey of such services were presented by Sandy Slade (University of Victoria) and subsequently published by Slade and Webb (1985), with an expanded version of the survey presented to the 1986 Off-Campus Library Services Conference in Reno, Nevada (Slade, 1987). This survey revealed that 24 university institutions in Canada were involved, either singly or in collaboration with others, in distance or other off-campus programmes. In view of this significant involvement (at least half of all Canadian universities), an itinerary (described below) was prepared to enable the author to visit a representative sample of universities across Canada, with the ultimate aim of making proposals to establish similar services at NIHED. The results of this investigation and other published reports (Carriere, 1982; Latham, 1987; Lessin, 1983, and 1986; Howard, 1985; Mount and Turple, 1980; Slade et al., 1987; Whitehead, 1987) certainly confirm that the offering of the complete range of university facilities, including library services, to the so-called 'non-traditional' or off-campus students is an accepted part of continuing education provision on the North American continent.

Outline of study tour

At the request of the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, all the arrangements for the study tour were made on their behalf by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in Hull, Quebec. From a combination of requests and suggestions received from librarians the author had planned to visit, CIDA devised an extensive itinerary incorporating visits to eight university institutions across Canada (Ottawa, Lakehead, Brandon, Athabasca, Victoria, Simon Fraser, British Columbia, and the Open Learning Institute) whose libraries are involved in the provision of substantial off-campus library services. The details that follow summarize the principal points concerning off-campus academic programmes and appropriate library support noted from each institution.

University of Ottawa (Ottawa, Ontario)

This university offers several degree programmes through the media of correspondence and / or teleconferencing, and also offers some face-to-face courses at centres in eastern Ontario. All teleconference courses make use of the electronic blackboard, which, in conjunction with their 40 teleconference telephone lines, permits the offering of 'live', interactive courses to communities throughout Ontario and indeed, further afield. These courses follow the normal University calendar. Faculty involved in teleconference tuition in addition to full-time teaching on-campus are paid an additional $400 per semester and are expected to visit each teleconference centre at least once per semester. Correspondence courses, although primarily print-based, may also include an audiotape component, and are offered in both French and English. Students may register for these courses at any time during the year. Admission requirements and fees are identical to those for on-campus students.

The university library supports this continuing education provision with one off-campus services librarian (but no support staff) in the Morisset Library's Collection Development Department. Distance education students may contact this individual to request loans or photocopies of specific items (including interlibrary loans), to make reference enquiries (including bibliographic instruction assistance) and to place online search requests. There is, however, no toll-free or collect-call telephone facility as is found in many other institutions: this cost has therefore to be borne by the student. Support for those students attending 'face-to-face' courses at the centres in eastern Ontario is normally provided from core collections located at these centres. These collections, whose current annual budget from the University of Ottawa is around $20000 / $25000 per centre, are interfiled with the local collection, which may be that of a public or college library, depending on the centre, and are therefore available also to the local community. Local library staff at these centres attend the University library for 1 days' training per year, to help familiarize them with the procedures and services of the Morisset Library.

Lakehead University (Thunder Bay, Ontario)

Up to 1987, this university did not offer distance education courses for credit, but instead offered 'face-to-face' courses at 17 centres throughout northwestern Ontario. As a result of a decision by the Ontarian provincial government to invest $5 million in distance education over the next few years, however, Lakehead, along with other Ontarian universities, plans to introduce such courses designated by the name 'Signal North'. This distance education programme is to have 11 centres linked by the universities' 'NODEAN' telecommunications network for teleconferencing, including computer teleconferencing. Media to be used will include correspondence + video + audio, with some teaching material from Wilfrid Laurier and Waterloo Universities in southern Ontario, and from TV Ontario. Audio and video equipment will be located at the centres for those students without their own equipment.

Existing course support consists of a small deposit collection (of around 50 university-owned items) housed in the local public or school library for each centre, but backed up with substantial service from one librarian and one support staff (both part-time) in the University Library. This consists of access to a collect-call telephone answering service known as 'UNILINK', through which students may request loans, photocopies, reference assistance or online literature searches, and to the provision of such materials to the student's home address by 'Priority Post' at the university's expense. All services are free, except for online literature searches, for which payment is required, as it would be for any on-campus student. Interlibrary loan service, however, is NOT provided; students are expected to use the interlibrary loans facility of the Ontario Library Service, through their local public library.

Brandon University (Brandon, Manitoba)

Under the designation 'Inter-Universities North' (IUN), the three universities in the province of Manitoba (Brandon, Manitoba and Winnipeg) provide a cooperative programme of credit courses funded by the provincial government to residents living in the relatively more remote areas north of the 53rd parallel. Students may choose the university with which they wish to be registered, and which of the three universities' courses they wish to follow (within prescribed limits) since credits can generally be transferred easily. Most instruction is 'face-to-face' at weekends at one of the 19 IUN local centres in northern Manitoba, although it is possible for students to supplement their studies with courses offered in a correspondence mode.

Library support for the whole IUN programme is provided by one full-time librarian and one part-time support staff based at Brandon. A 'Northern' collection of around 11000 books and periodical articles is maintained within Brandon University Library as a distinct entity, with a current annual budget of $10000 for book purchases. From this collection transfers can be made to public libraries at the local centres, at the suggestion of the instructor giving the course, but no material is sent from the main university library collection at Brandon. In addition, transfers frequently occur between centres. Free telephone and postage facilities are available to enable off-campus students to request loans, photocopies, interlibrary loans, reference assistance and literature searches, although, as in most institutions, a charge is made for online searches.

Athabasca University (Athabasca, Alberta)

This unique (that is, entirely distance education) institution was established in Edmonton in 1970, but was relocated to the town of Athabasca itself in 1984. Although it aims to provide access to university level education for all adult Canadians, currently 60% of its student population is located in the two principal cities of Alberta, namely Edmonton and Calgary. Home-study students may register for most courses at any time of the year and receive specially-designed home-study learning packages, consisting of course units, books, study notes and assignments. Some courses may be supplemented with radio or television programmes, audiotapes, workshops or laboratories, but no video production is carried out at Athabasca. Seminar and teleconference students receive similar learning packages, but participate locally in scheduled seminar or teleconference sessions. All students have free telephone access (within a 3-hour period each week) to a 'local' tutor, who helps to maintain a personal link between the student and the university. Tutors themselves may initiate contact with students, to ensure that some contact takes place at least once a month. The direct supervisor of the tutor is a faculty member at Athabasca (and usually the author of the course), and these individuals meet twice or three times per year. Students may request examinations at almost any time of year. In addition to its teaching functions, the university is currently establishing a Centre for Distance Education, whose task will be to carry out research and development in open learning systems.

When located in Edmonton, library services for the university were heavily dependent on the libraries of the University of Alberta and the local public library system. This drew some criticism from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, and as a result, Alberta Advanced Education provided the university with $5.2 million, phased over several years, to build up the library on its relocation to Athabasca. Although students may borrow materials in person, most of the library's business is of necessity conducted by telephone (via collect calls costing around $5000 per year at 1986 prices) and mail (using either first class or library rate postage at a cost of around $6000 per year at 1986 prices). Loans, photocopies and interlibrary loans are provided free of charge, but requests for interlibrary loans of books are not accepted: students are advised to use their local public library instead. There is no programme of bibliographic instruction at present, although bibliographic 'pathfinders' are produced by the Athabasca librarians. Consideration is being given to providing a printed library instruction kit (using a Central Michigan University model) to all students on registration. Very few requests for online literature searching originate from students. Materials loaned include audio- and videotapes (usually of radio and television broadcast programmes that the student has missed) and relevant hardware, and it is intended to add microcomputer software in the near future. The library holds two copies of every course package - one for in-library use and one for circulation. For additional information on Athabasca University's library service provision, see Appavoo (1985).

University of Victoria (Victoria, British Columbia)

Involvement with off-campus education at the University of Victoria began with face-to-face teaching, mostly of courses in the area of education, at local community colleges on Vancouver Island, and subsequently on the British Columbia mainland. Now there is less face-to-face teaching and more true distance education with instruction delivered directly to the student's home. Both methods currently cover a wide range of professional development courses (education, social work, nursing, child care, public administration and computer science). With the greater availability of satellite broadcasting (e.g. British Columbia's Knowledge Network), this has become the principal method of delivery, although audio- and videotapes, computer assisted instruction, audioconferencing and print media are all used. As elsewhere, regular telephone contact with a tutor is maintained as a vital part of distance learning.

In 1980, modest library support for off-campus students in some programmes was begun under the name 'INFOLINE'. This provided a support staff member (not a professional librarian), toll-free telephone line, first-class delivery of loans and photocopies to the student, and free return post, and a reference service. All operating costs were covered by funding from the University of Victoria's Division of University Extension (Slade et al., 1987). The success of this pilot scheme encouraged the Extension Division to widen the coverage of the service with the addition of a librarian and modest computing facilities, to provide full-time assistance to all off-campus students, in an attempt to achieve equity between services for on- and off-campus students. Thus, interlibrary loans service within British Columbia is provided for off-campus students where assignment deadlines permit, and in the case of online search services, which are provided at the librarian's discretion, off-campus students are, unusually, not required to pay the costs (whereas on-campus students are). Normal loan regulations, including recall requirements and fines policies, apply equally to both groups of students. A telephone answering machine is used to receive requests from off-campus students and instructors. The librarian returns calls only to discuss unusual or problematic requests. Where face-to-face off-campus instruction still exists, a small collection of library material can be sent to the course site at the request of the local instructor. This is drawn from the university's entire library holdings, since the University of Victoria does not maintain a separate extension collection. The Extension Librarian is a member of the University's Distance Education Planning Group and is involved in discussions about library resources for each new off-campus course under development.

Simon Fraser University (Burnaby, British Columbia)

The establishment of the Division of Continuing Education in 1971 saw the beginnings of involvement in off-campus courses for Simon Fraser University (SFU). These were face-to-face courses at several centres beyond the Vancouver area that met a specific demand from students in these localities. To help extend this facility to a more widely spread audience, the university established in 1975 its Directed Independent Study Course (DISC) programme of correspondence courses, which have since grown in number to over 100.

Formalized library services for SFU off-campus students were inaugurated in 1979 under the designation 'TELEBOOK' (Slade et al., 1987). Prior to that date, the principal method of providing service had been by means of core collections placed in the SFU Continuing Education centres outside the Vancouver conurbation. Such was the success of TELEBOOK that in due course it replaced the core collections as the symbol of university library services to all SFU off-campus students, not only in British Columbia, but in other Canadian provinces, the USA and further afield. At present, the service operates with an External Services Librarian (as coordinator) and 1.5 full-time equivalent support staff, although other reference librarians and support staff can be called upon at any time to assist. Telephone requests are received as collect calls and TELEBOOK staff prefer to talk directly with students (rather than just to receive messages on an answering machine) in an attempt to minimize the need for call-backs, although an answering machine is available for occasions when no staff member is available. Service is provided not just to the 'traditional' off-campus students such as distance education students and those taking SFU courses at other centres, but also to those who may have to be away from the SFU campus for long periods as part of their studies, and to those in SFU prison course programmes (via a prison librarian). Requests may also be sent by electronic mail or by regular postal service, particularly where a student is requesting more than five items at a time. Loans, available from all of the university library's lending collections, are sent out by book rate post, but photocopies are sent by first-class post.

Open Learning Institute (Richmond, British Columbia)

The Open Learning Institute (OLI) was established by the provincial government of British Columbia in 1978 to offer undergraduate degrees; career, technical and vocational studies; and adult basic education, principally through the medium of distance education. As such, OLI is a member of the Open University Consortium of British Columbia, along with the three established universities and the Knowledge Network (British Columbia's educational telecommunications authority). Under the auspices of this Consortium, it is possible for students to combine approved courses from the four institutions to achieve a first degree by distance education. OLI course sessions start every 2 months, and the course fee covers all required texts in addition to tuition and course materials. There are currently (1987) 19000 course enrolments.

Library service for OLI students is provided from the general collection at SFU Library in Burnaby, since, at the time of setting up the Institute, it was realized that creation of a worthwhile library to cover all the subject areas likely to be offered by distance education would be prohibitively expensive (Slade et al., 1987). A separate library service, for OLI staff only, operates from the OLI headquarters in Richmond, but this is primarily a library specializing in distance education as a discipline in its own right. The OLI student library service is provided by one librarian located in the SFU Library, who offers collect-call telephone access to all Institute students located in British Columbia, the Yukon or the North-West Territories. Students outside these areas are expected to send their requests by post. Phone calls need only give the name and telephone number of the student, since the librarian will call back for full details of the request or information query. Requested items not held at the SFU Library will be sought on interlibrary loan within British Columbia. OLI pays an annual charge to SFU of $15000 for the use of the SFU Library. Additional charges met by OLI directly include the costs of staff salary, postage and photocopying. Occasionally, OLI will purchase books in support of courses, and these are donated to the SFU Library. Bibliographic instruction is not provided at present, although plans have existed for several years to produce a television programme on the use of libraries, to be transmitted by the province's Knowledge Network. So far, these plans have not come to fruition.

University of British Columbia (Vancouver, British Columbia)

Off-campus education has been in existence at the University of British Columbia (UBC) since the early 1940s. Currently (1987), around 60 correspondence-based courses, some with supporting video material, are offered under the auspices of the Guided Independent Study office at UBC. In addition, over 30 face-to-face courses are available from individual departments within UBC at off-campus centres in British Columbia, giving a total student population of over 2000.

UBC's extension library service is offered under the designation 'DIAL-A-BOOK', by a half-time librarian, a half-time support staff member and casual assistance as and when required (Slade et al., 1987; Whitehead, 1987). It is based on a separate extension library collection whose original user population included not only extension students but also members of the public, when public library services in British Columbia were less well developed than today. Nowadays, the collection supports UBC's extension credit courses through the provision of 19 deposit collections (10-150 titles each, with a total of 1100 items) at UBC's off-campus centres, and the reading requirements of extension students within the North American continent. The extension collection is not available to on-campus students, to ensure that off-campus students have a reasonable chance of obtaining the readings they require, although off-campus students do have access to the complete UBC library collection. Access is by collect-call telephone call to an answering machine, or by mail. Interlibrary loans service is not normally offered to undergraduates. Most of the costs of the service (staff, telephone, postage and photocopying) are met by the Open Learning Authority, administered by the University's central administration. The university library provides funds for new book purchases, around $3000 per year at 1987 prices.

Other Canadian universities:

Although not visited during the study tour, some information has been obtained in relation to the following universities to confirm the extent of their involvement in providing library services to off-campus students, and has been included here to give a wider perspective of the service provision available in Canada. This is, of course, not a complete list of the Canadian universities and other educational institutions involved in this topic.

University of New Brunswick (Fredericton, New Brunswick)

At the request of an extension course instructor, deposit collections can be sent from the main university library to a local public library for the duration of that course. Alternatively, off-campus students may telephone the university library directly, with a request for items to be sent to them on loan, or with a request for reference assistance.

Trent University (Peterborough, Ontario)

The university's Continuing Education Centre maintains a collection of library material which can be sent to the one off-campus centre at Durham College, Oshawa, Ontario, as required. Off-campus students also have access to the university library's main collection and reference-assistance facilities through a collect-call telephone service. Materials are sent between the university library and the off-campus centre (in both directions) by a daily van courier service.

University of Manitoba (Winnipeg, Manitoba)

A library mail service is provided for students, living outside Winnipeg, who are taking credit courses by correspondence, by teleconference, or at off-campus centres. Requests can be made by toll-free telephone call or by post. Material from all the university's libraries is available and delivered to the student at no charge, although payment is required for photocopies of periodical articles requested by graduate students. The Continuing Education Division pays for undergraduate photocopies and telephone calls, and the Library meets the cost of staff salaries, collection development and postage.

Common Components of Off-Campus Library Services

The above information demonstrates the extent to which libraries provide service to off-campus students in different universities in Canada. Additional information relating to other Canadian universities can be found in the results of the survey of 24 university libraries reported by Slade and Webb (1985) and Slade (1987). Using these results, it is possible to draw the following conclusions about the most commonly found features associated with Canadian off-campus library services. The format of the comparisons follows that of Slade et al. (1987).

Core collections:

Most Canadian university libraries involved in off-campus library services maintain (or perhaps more accurately, claim to maintain) core collections intended largely for the exclusive use of off-campus students who are receiving face-to-face teaching at an off-campus centre. However, the additional expense involved in supporting these collections, and the growing popularity of distance learning has led some libraries to see a service based on separate collections as being no longer feasible, and it is increasingly common to allow access also to any item in the main collection of the university library.

Special telephone line:

Fewer than half of the responding libraries in the survey had a special telephone line available in the library itself, whereby students could call the library toll-free or on reversed charges (collect). This facility, coupled with an answering machine, encourages students to call the library with their requests or queries at any convenient time, without worrying over the cost, and can be seen as a clear indicator of the university's willingness to give off-campus students equal access to the university's facilities and services as is given to on-campus students. At some universities without this facility in the library, a toll-free telephone line may be available to other departments on the campus, from where calls from off-campus students can be transferred to the library.

Specific material requests:

Almost all of the university libraries surveyed send specifically requested material to students at no additional charge. If sought materials are not immediately available, some libraries will supply appropriate substitute items at the discretion of the librarian.

Reference queries:

Not surprisingly, most libraries accept reference questions from, and conduct subject literature searches on behalf of, off-campus students. Frequently, this includes the supply to a student of relevant books and periodical articles, if requested.

Interlibrary loans:

About half of the libraries undertake interlibrary loan searches for material not held in stock at the student's home institution library. Where interlibrary loan service is provided, it is frequently restricted to applications to other university libraries in the same or in an adjacent province, because of the importance of a speedy service.

Online literature searches:

Around half of the libraries use online literature searches to meet students' requests for bibliographic information. Common practice is for the library to charge the student for at least part of the cost incurred, where the student has initiated the request. The cost of librarian-initiated requests is not charged to the student, in line with most university libraries' normal practices.

Advertisement of services:

Surprisingly, not all libraries publicized their services for off-campus students. Where they do so (in just over half of the universities surveyed), this usually takes the form of brochures and leaflets, and descriptive items in course manuals and general student handouts.

Professional Librarian:

Another surprise was the fact that only half of the university libraries operated their off-campus services under the direct supervision of a professional librarian. And in those libraries that did provide professional staffing for the service, several had only part-time responsibility for this work.

Bibliographic instruction:

Probably because of the lack of professional service, fewer than half of the libraries are able to offer regular bibliographic instruction to off-campus students. Where courses are not distance-learning-based, but centre-based, such instruction can be undertaken during visits by the off-campus services librarian to the off-campus centre. Other methods used include teleconferencing, use of audiovisual media, correspondence assistance and referral to a local public library.

Support staff:

As might be expected, more university libraries have support staff assistance than full professional service for their off-campus library services. Nevertheless, seven libraries are identified in the survey as having neither category of staff designated to provide the service. It must be assumed that in these cases, the work takes up a very limited part of other staff members' responsibilities.

Charges for services:

Most institutions, reasonably enough, do not make an additional charge to their off-campus students for access to the library's services, since this is seen as a matter of equity between on- and off-campus students, to have equal right of access to university facilities. On-line literature search fees and photocopying costs, however, usually have to be passed on (to both groups) because of the high expenditures that can be involved.

Summary of component parts of the service:

It is useful at this point to review the component parts that make up an off-campus library service, as identified in the survey reports (Slade and Webb, 1985; Slade, 1987). If one assumes that all libraries have a collection of some sort on which all their services are based, then the fundamental components on which any reasonably substantive off-campus library service must be based will be:

a) staff - professional;
b) staff - support;
c) publicity.

The necessity of these components lies in the fact that since the student is by definition not on the university's campus (or at least not during the hours of normal academic service), and cannot therefore function in the more usual self-service fashion expected of his/her on-campus counterpart, he/she will need to receive documentary information about the facilities offered, and will require regular and detailed professional assistance to interpret the usual range of information requests that students make, including the identification and location of sought bibliographic items. In addition, there will need to be someone based on-campus to procure and deliver any sought items from the collection or from elsewhere.

Although not absolutely essential, the next level of components is highly desirable for an effective service to off-campus students:

d) telephone - direct line (not via a campus switchboard);
e) telephone answering machine.

These two features, when combined, allow the university library to offer reversed charge (collect) call facilities, since the message accepting the charges can be recorded as part of the answer message given to the telephone operator at the start of each incoming call, without the need to involve local switchboard staff in any additional work. Obviously, these facilities can be replaced by a postal service, but the need for a rapid response from the library in dealing with loan and information requests related to student assignments with tight deadlines, makes the mail service a relatively ineffective means of providing prompt library access at a distance.

Library service and the quality of off-campus education

Having identified the main elements of any substantial off-campus library service, it is important to emphasize the value of library access in relation to the quality of the off-campus student's educational experience, including any assignments and other work undertaken during the course. Fisher (1986) has suggested that the amount of reading undertaken by students is a yardstick of academic standards for any university programme. As a result, some distance education programmes are criticized for being less academically rigorous than their on-campus counterparts because the packaging of the programme, for off-campus consumption, is liable to create an element of spoonfeeding of the student. That is, students may feel, however erroneously, that the distance education 'package' represents the full extent of the reading that they must undertake. To accept this viewpoint would be, in effect, to deny students access to the very broad range of information held in the academic library, with a consequential diminution of the intellectual stimulation received by them during their course. It is the importance given by all involved with the course to providing this stimulation, that determines the quality of any academic programme. This inevitably includes the provision of a high-quality library service, since the range of assignments that can be tackled, and the level of intellectual stimulation achieved, where students have easy access to a good academic library will be much greater than where such access is lacking.

For example, it is unlikely that even a very substantial distance education package could contain more than two or three textbooks plus a dozen or so periodical articles (or their equivalent) for any one course. No on-campus student would be considered to be well-read, and therefore well-educated, with such a limited reading background; no off-campus student should be equally limited either, if the courses are to be considered of equal educational merit. This means having easy access to a good general collection of loanable texts in all relevant subject areas plus a substantial reference collection of bibliographies (abstracting and indexing periodicals and once-off publications), encyclopaedias (general and specialized), directories (of people and organizations) and government publications (national and international), for instance, with equally easy access to a professional librarian who can assist the student in the exploitation of these resources. Without this, lecturers will be restricted to designing courses for off-campus presentation, and related assignments, around a very narrow range of reading material, to the detriment of the course standard and of the students themselves. It is worthy of note that in his surveys, Fisher (1986) observed no difference in the amount of reading undertaken by on- and off-campus students, and concluded that this should be seen as a justification for the provision of a full library service for off-campus students.

Cost factors to be considered

Slade and Webb (1985) and Slade (1987) have also identified the various budget elements that need to be considered as part of a comprehensive off-campus library service:

1) Start-up / capital charges (e.g. telephone line installation, answering machine);

2) Printing and production costs for publicity brochures, leaflets and other forms;

3) Salaries for a professional librarian, support staff and any casual assistance to be used;

4) Telephone rental and call charges (which may include a significant long-distance portion);

5) Postage / packing charges (including the cost of return postage for loans);

6) Photocopying costs;

7) Interlibrary loan charges;

8) Online computer literature search costs (including connect time, telephone or data transmission charges and print charges, for online databases, or a share of hardware, software and database subscription costs for CD-ROM databases);

9) Travel expenses for those staff involved in visiting off-campus centres (for bibliographic instruction, for example), and more generally for staff development.

An additional cost-factor noted by the authors of the survey was the use of a university toll-free telephone number from which calls could be diverted to the library. This has not been included here since toll-free telephone calls (WATS - wide area telephone service, or the '800' facility), do not exist within Telecomm Eireann's range of telephone services at present.

With the principal cost factors associated with the service identified, the Canadian survey (Slade and Webb, 1985; Slade, 1987) then noted several options through which these costs could be met:

a) The service operates as a service totally subsidized by the university, with all costs being met out of the existing general institutional budget;

b) A set service fee is levied for each potential student user and paid with tuition fees, or a per-use charge (or charges) is/are levied on actual users;

c) Budget component 3) above is minimized by reassigning existing library staff to off-campus services in preference to, or in addition to, their regular duties;

d) Budget component 4) above is minimized by requiring students to pay for their own incoming telephone calls (no reverse charge facility) or to submit requests by post;

e) Budget components 5) - 8) above are minimized by recovering some or all of the costs involved from users directly;

f) Budget component 9) above is minimized by eliminating staff travel to off-campus centres;

g) The service operates as a partially subsidized facility, with some costs being met by outside sponsors or other interested parties not directly part of the university.

The situation in Ireland

The principal centre for distance education in Ireland is the National Distance Education Centre, located on the campus of the National Institute for Higher Education, Dublin, although other education and training institutions (for example, AnCO - the Industrial Training Authority) have become involved in the topic (Bolger, 1981; Ricketts, 1983). Part-time higher education, which is also encompassed in this section of the report, is, of course, offered by virtually all tertiary-level educational institutions, but with apparently little significant effort made to provide convenient access to library holdings and services for the students concerned.

In 1982, the National Distance Education Centre began to offer the first of its programmes - an introduction to computing - in a virtually self-contained mode which, because of its limited duration (about 10 weeks), and low level (a beginner's course), did not necessitate access to supporting library facilities. Printed material, in conjunction with nationally-broadcast television programmes and hands-on practical work in local study centres throughout the Republic of Ireland provided all the instruction deemed necessary for the large number of participants in the programme.

In 1985, a proposal from the Centre to the Academic Council of NIHED, which had agreed to validate any of its distance education degree programmes found to be academically acceptable, to introduce a modular diploma / degree programme in Information Technology necessitated a more detailed consideration by the Library of its responsibilities to the potential student body that would be associated with this programme. Principally, the Library wanted to ensure that this group, which would be registered as NIHED students through the special relationship between the National Distance Education Centre and NIHED, along with the other so-called off-campus students associated with NIHED (mainly part-time students of undergraduate degree programmes), would not be disadvantaged in relation to access to library services, compared with conventional full-time on-campus students, as outlined in the introduction to this report. This 'equality of access' approach is fairly typical of those Canadian (and other North American) universities that have attempted the serious provision of library services to their off-campus students.

<u>The options for library service open to NIHED include the following:</u>

a) ask the public libraries throughout Ireland to take the NIHED off-campus students under their wing, and to upgrade themselves to the extent that they could provide as complete as possible academic library-type services as part of their normal public service remit, or in exchange for some agreed payment under contract from the National Distance Education Centre and NIHED;

b) ask the other universities and colleges in Ireland to provide their normal academic library services to these NIHED off-campus students on the same bases as the public libraries;

c) provide deposit collections of relevant books and journal articles from the holdings of the Library of NIHED, to be distributed to distance education study centres or other libraries across Ireland for the duration of a term or academic year (or some other appropriate period);

d) allow access to the collections of the NIHED Library by these off-campus students by post and/or telephone;

These options would, of course, be equally applicable to any other educational institution in Ireland that decided to establish a fully-functioning off-campus educational programme, with library support to the extent envisaged at NIHED.

Option a) has the merit of providing a geographically widespread network of access points to library services for the students. It is recognized, however, that public library collections, especially in rural areas, are largely irrelevant to higher level academic programmes. Not all public library branches, therefore, could be expected to offer the full library and information service that higher education requires and expects, since the present level of public library funding in Ireland is quite inadequate for such a major development, in terms of both the stock and staffing required. In fact, it is doubtful if any public library authority outside the Dublin area could attempt this, and Dublin, logically, is the area of least need in this context. The level of payment that could be made by the National Distance Education Centre and NIHED to each public library for service provision (the alternative within option a)) would in all probability be so small as to be insignificant in relation to the service required. Or, to look at the question from another standpoint, with 286 public library branches in the Republic of Ireland, financial support of say, £1000 per annum for books, journals and minimal extra part-time staffing to only 10% of these libraries would cost over £28,000 per year at 1987 prices.

Option b), although offering a much smaller network, does build on existing higher education libraries in Ireland, with their established services specifically designed for undergraduate (and higher level) students. Nevertheless, problems still exist with this option: the larger libraries would claim (as indeed they do at present) that they are not able to cope with additional student numbers from other universities and colleges, since they are funded only for their own students, and could provide library service to another institution's students only at the expense of their own, which would be unacceptable to them; the smaller libraries (that is, those of the Regional Technical Colleges) being part of the public library service, would have most of the public libraries' problems, whilst suffering the same difficulties

as the larger libraries. It should be noted that the National Distance Education Centre, in support of its Information Technology programme, has negotiated (with some difficulties, mainly of an administrative nature) library support from the Colleges at its study centres in Limerick, Sligo and Waterford, but only by having the distance-education students re-registered as students of the other Colleges. Although this has been working adequately for the earlier years of the programme, it will inevitably create difficulties for these other institutions, and for the distance education students, in the later years, when there will be less likelihood of the other libraries holding the more specialized texts required by the Distance Education Centre's programmes. Provision of the same level of financial support as described in Option a) above to all 19 libraries in this category would still cost a substantial sum of money - £19,000 per year at 1987 prices.

It appears that Option c) is the preferred option for several universities in Canada, since it can often limit the recurrent expenditure needed to support off-campus students. Public and other libraries, and other institutions acting as off-campus centres in Ireland would be unlikely to reject any request to house such deposit collections, provided that space was not a problem, since they would not be required to spend large sums of money to provide the service. In fact, this approach has already been adopted by NIHED itself in the provision of library support to its off-campus students following the joint NIHED-University of Ulster MBA programme at Dundalk Regional Technical College. But in this instance, the capital costs are met entirely from the fee income of the students concerned. Without such financial support for the library (which, for a group of say, 12 study centres would be considerable), it is really feasible only for those university libraries with very large collections, from which deposit collections could be compiled without severely weakening the main library collection. Of course, the centres to which the deposit collections are sent need to have a guaranteed minimum off-campus local student population to justify the existence of these collections. And removing crucial texts from the main campus library may provide useful support to off-campus students, but to the ultimate detriment of the on-campus student body. In addition, the question of copyright clearance for legitimate multiple photocopies of journal articles would require a considerable staffing effort to monitor and control - certainly greater than that which NIHED could sustain currently.

Option d) was the single most popular method of library support provided to off-campus students by Canadian university libraries, according to the survey cited previously (Slade and Webb, 1985; Slade, 1987), with 21 out of the 24 responding libraries offering a 'specific request' service. The principal variation that was observed between the institutions in their operation of this service was in the funding of the method of access. Three choices (at least) are clear: the student pays some or all of the cost on a per-use basis; the Library pays some or all of the cost; or the Continuing/Extension Education Department in

the university pays some or all of the cost. A major difficulty with this type of service is the possibly open-ended nature of the institution's resource commitment to it in any financial year. Although observations at several of the universities where access is not charged directly to students suggest that the take-up of the service is rarely likely to exceed 20% of potential users, there is nevertheless no clear method of controlling costs, without introducing significant and unfortunate changes to access during an academic year. Against that, there is the very powerful argument that the institution, in providing exactly this type of service to off-campus programme students, is making an unequivocal statement on the equality of on- and off-campus students, giving each the unrestricted access to academic support that all require.

Having weighed up the pros and cons of each method of service provision, it is clear to the author that only Option d) above could be operated successfully from the Library of NIHED for all of the Institute's off-campus students. It is highly unlikely that other institutions and libraries would be able to offer a real (i.e. complete) academic library service to NIHED off-campus students, given the economic constraints under which all publicly funded organizations have to operate currently. Nor is the NIHED Library sufficiently well-stocked that it could supply deposit collections from its existing holdings to NIHED off-campus centres throughout Ireland (the financing of the MBA programme at Dundalk, referred to above, is at the moment unique and unlikely to be repeated). But with a little additional support, it is likely that the NIHED Library could make its lending collections available to those students barred from using the Institute's resources by virtue of distance or, in the case of part-time students, time constraints.

The additional support referred to above is required to cover the essential elements of the service already outlined from the Canadian survey (Slade and Webb, 1985; Slade, 1987), i.e. professional and support staff, printing of promotional and explanatory leaflets and forms, and outgoing postage costs, as well as the cost of certain desirable elements, i.e. return postage, telephone, other telecommunication and travel costs. It is difficult to quantify these costs with precision, in view of their largely speculative nature. Costs will also relate directly to the type and level of service being offered, and for the purposes of these calculations, it is expected that off-campus students would not be expected to pay any more for library service than on-campus students do, through their tuition fees.

On the assumption that Option d) above was to be implemented for an off-campus student population of say, 1000, paying the same level of tuition fees as their on-campus counterparts, and using the cost factors already listed, the following estimated costs to the Library of NIHED could be expected, at 1987 prices:

	IR£
Start-up cost (phone line installation + answering machine)	500
Printing of 1000 publicity leaflets and 5000 request forms	600
One-year salary cost for 0.5 FTE assistant librarian grade 1 and 1 FTE library assistant grade 1	9000
Freephone rental and call charges for 1 year	1000
Postage costs for say, 1000 loans (both directions)	2000
Photocopying costs for say, 2000 pages	100
Interlibrary loan costs for say, 200 items, where student pays nominal charge of £1 per request (as for all other students at NIHED)	300
Online computer literature search indirect costs for say, 50 searches, where student pays direct costs	100
Travel expenses for professional librarian to visit off-campus centres for bibliographic instruction	400
Total for first year of operation	14000
Marginal cost of off-campus service per registered student	14.00
Recurring (annual) costs	13500
Recurring (marginal) cost per off-campus student per year	13.50

For comparison, the Library's recurring costs, excluding purchase of books and periodicals and binding costs, amount to £76.70 per on-campus student per year, at 1987 prices. In view of the low marginal cost per student involved, and of the low overall cost compared with the estimated costs for Options a) and b) it is recommended that Option d) of the four possible models of access to NIHED library services be implemented from 1988. The opening of the extension to the NIHED Library in autumn 1987 provides the necessary space and some of the other facilities necessary for this to take place. It would be appropriate to link the opening of this building with a significant expansion of the Library's service to its most under-served group of customers.

If NIHED wishes to maintain (or, more accurately, establish, since discrimination is clearly taking place) equity of treatment in the provision of academic services between its established full-time on-campus student population and the growing part-time / off-campus student population, this modest proposal deserves careful consideration. Acceptance of the need to adopt the proposal will be seen by a currently critical and for the most part mature student body as an indication of

NIHED's willingness to improve its present poor level of service to these students. As has been stated previously, although this report deals exclusively with the need for off-campus services seen from the viewpoint of the National Distance Education Centre and the National Institute for Higher Education, Dublin, the general conclusions are equally applicable to any other universities and colleges in Ireland that may decide to offer similar programmes.

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